

Hallmarks

2017





Hallmarks 2017

A Literary Magazine

The Harpeth Hall School
3801 Hobbs Road
Nashville, TN 37215

*Cover image (pastel drawing) by Sadie Paczosa
Back cover watercolor by Grace Claybrook
Photograph (at left) by Paige Derwenskus*

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Phoenixaria

Poem by Lizzy Asad
Watercolor and gouache on paper (detail)
by Jordyn Lesh

Words hide in the feathers of a voice—
They fly through flumes of sound.
Words stick to the slippery beak of speech—
They preen themselves with punctuation.

After they feed on the seed of language,
do they choke on the worms of silence?
After they slumber in the throat's nest,
do they fear the fall from the mouth?

Where do words go to die?

The answer is this:
Words
Do
not
Die.

They take flight.

They reawaken in l e t t e r s.
Words do not fade—
they sink their claws into the bark of time's tree.
Words do not abandon—
they shine in even the darkest ravines of thought.
Words do not die—
they
scorch
the
soul.



A Brief Biography of Loneliness

or — A Love Letter to Him

(Probably Both)

Narrative by Kelsey Kay Herring
Photograph (film) by Emari Frazier

Loneliness always smelled of sweat and sunshine and something distinctly human. The sky unfurled before him, and he went out late at night, drifting through dusty, smoky bars, drinking with the stars, reminiscing about the days before there were curfews and pollution. His friend, Silence, would join him, as he always did when alcohol and sleep deprivation mixed. They didn't talk much; between the hangover headaches and the pounding in their bones, there was little room for words, or worlds, or memories.

Loneliness loved Silence the way men love other men: a mutual, usually



understated, recognition and appreciation of the other's existence. Silence would help Loneliness remember what the universe was and for whom it existed. Silence kept him off the train tracks, and for that, I am eternally grateful.

Loneliness felt like a current, gently aware of its own strength. He was painfully far away, and very, very near. Like the song in the back of your head or tomorrow. And he loved living because he loved dying, like how the setting of the sun is just the backdrop for its miraculous comeback story. He would never ruin a moment with words because he understood the internal power of his friend, Silence, and his profound ability to explain himself. Loneliness was one of those who couldn't be swallowed up by the world, he wouldn't drown in it, no matter how hard the world tried. He hated Silence sometimes because Silence couldn't swim. But Loneliness always found a way to save him. Loneliness was the best life guard. Even in the winter.

Loneliness didn't have many enemies—one of the advantages to living the life of a nomad. But he and No One never got along. He disliked No One the way men dislike other men, with cool disinterest and flaming focus. With rage, caged. No One never noticed the eye rolls or the missed phone calls or the topic changers. He thought they were buddies, I suppose. A part of the trinity—Loneliness, Silence, and No One. Silence laughed at No One sometimes, at the sheer ridiculousness of it all. Loneliness never laughed, only raged.

And Loneliness was a mystery to No One. Loneliness skipped from job to job—No One was never brave enough to ask him where he worked. No One didn't even know how he got along, where he got all his money. It was possible that he didn't have any, but Loneliness never asked for help. His handshakes were always strong, so No One never worried. Loneliness never invited No One over, so No One never knew where he lived. He seemed to appear out of a sigh or a shrug of the shoulders. No One never saw where he showered, where he ate. Loneliness wanted it that way.

Loneliness probably wouldn't like the idea of a biography, but I could not think of any other way to honor him, to tell his story. He didn't let many people in, and Silence wasn't about to speak up. And in risk of offending Silence, I just want to say that I will choose Loneliness every time. Not because he was safe—he was the kind of dangerous that accompanies dark side streets and smiles from strangers. Not because he was easy—he was painful and confusing, and he felt like the color gray or putting on sweatpants. Not because No One wanted him. Not because he liked me. Not because he didn't.

But because he always smelled of sweat and sunshine and something distinctly human. And he always felt like home.

Sorry,

Silence.

Who

Poem by Ella McKenzie
Digital art by Sarah Johnson

Who doesn't recognize her own voice,
Who smokes sage from an apple pipe,
Whose eyes are dollar-green and quarter-round,
Who blinks like an incandescent bulb,
 Who was dragged down by the stone,
Who dreams of phenomenology,
Whose future is bike rides to bus stops,
Whose future is buildings built in 1722,
Whose future is toothache,
Whose immediacy is toothache,
Whose memory is airheads, airheads and toothache,
Whose memory is Catullus,
 immediacy Vergil,
 future Homer,
Who takes incense, drops fire, raises crowns of virginity,
Who breaks them too,
Whose story is not to be passed,
Whose past is not to be fabled,
Whose questions consume,
Whose life is a blade,
Whose life is a vapor,
Whose life is her love,
Whose love is her helium,
her oxygen,
her carbon monoxide.



Sleep Siren

Poem by Lizzy Asad
Oil on masonite by Susanna Andrews

Dicere quæ puduit, scribere iussit amor -Ovid
What I was ashamed to say, love has commanded me to write.

It starts with a fall,
A release from the too bright, too crowded mess of daylight
And ravaged birds pecking at every half-wormed idea—
the tangled ball of thoughts that will never be woven into something
tangible.

I step off from the cliff and
Fall
Into your waiting arms.
You cover my mouth with cold velvet hands
And whisper in my ear as I breathe the sweet floss of dreams.
I struggle to keep my eyes open, just to catch a glimpse of you—
But no one has ever seen you
And no one ever will.

You are
frigid black water just for drowning
slick twilight ice just for slipping
silk ravens that soar in grey rain splattered skies
the slit of a burnt candle's throat
Embers flickering with hours past.

You are the answer to every day's question.
Nothing can ever stop you, for you are invincible.
Let them try, you said.
I'll have them in the end.



You used to love me
because why else would you come to me every day
And hold me until the blistering sun
Burned
Your kingdom of dreams?

You used to twine lullabies into my hair
And cover my eyes with soft darkness
And although your night mares dragged me away,
I came back
For nothing could compare to the Dream of you.

I wanted to be yours.
That is, until you left me.

Left me too desperate to drown,
Crave the touch of a black feather,
Bare my own throat.

You left me...

I want to
Splinter your mind
Into bone white slivers that cut reality,
Shatter your wings
with one cool breath,
Suck the minutes and marrow
Out of your bones.

I want to break you.

But no one has ever mastered you,
And no one ever will.

Reflection



Poem by Augusta Bryan

She returns my stare but looks away quickly.
The space between us grows.
I lose sight of her;
she wanders off like a ghost.
In thunderstorms,
I see her at my feet.
At night, I see her
in windows.
This broken mirror
serves her no justice,
she feels the cracks
like thorns in her face.
I turn away.

Gap



Poem by Kaili Wang

When I hear the words *stereotype* and *expectation*,
I think of the jade necklaces I've received
And the red string that loops through each of them.
I think of the hard-boiled egg in a few drops of soy sauce
When my mother made sure the eggs were firm, immovable.
I think of the smoked salmon I bought at camp,
Which swam up to the surface of my consciousness to tell me that
There's a gap.
There's a gap between the smoked salmon and the instant Ramen.
There's a gap between the turtleneck poncho and the Aztec patterned cardigan.
There's a gap between the Mediterranean Gouda and the American cheddar.
There's now a gap between me and the hard-boiled egg of my childhood,
The yellow yolk incubated and solidified within the white shell of my peers.
Recently, they found out how to unboil a boiled egg.
But that may lay in the future, away from Connecticut,
Away from the Powder Puff cartoon of now.
Shall I defy the odds, reverse the boil
And crack open the raw egg,
Spilling the exposed yolk of my soul?

Social Contract (*after Rousseau*)



Poem by Anna Clarke Harrison

I have signed the social contract.

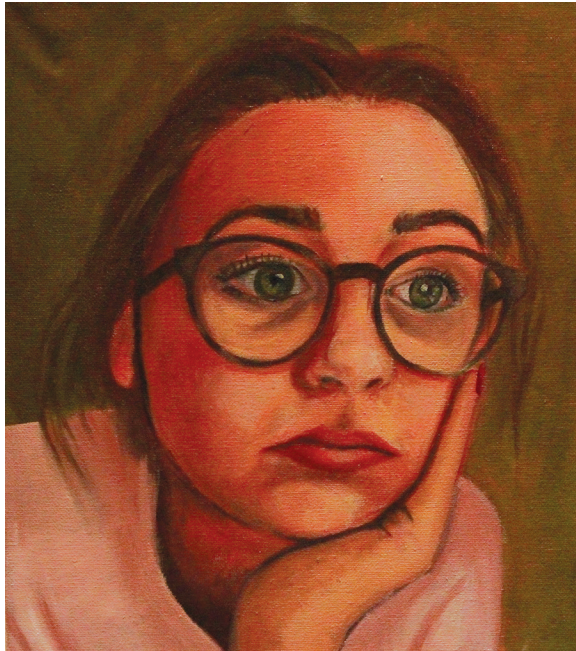
Not even I, the one with hollowed out bones,
Built for being unburdened
Can escape the corruption.

I cannot teach anyone to fly when I am stuck on the ground,
So I leave my five pure un-cracked eggs under another's wings
Hoping they will escape and learn to fly,
Better than I ever could.

Sitting on the damp dark earth,
I pray
to the heavens,
knowing no one is listening.
Still, I hope that someone will hear my plea
for a return to freedom,
for a way out of this contract,
which has rendered me flightless.

Adjectives

Poem by Haviland Whiting
Painting (oil on canvas) by Claire Trabue



I watch the dark ink of my ballpoint pen
Filter into the white spaces on the paper—
Curly, winding figures becoming letters,
Information
That you will keep as my application,
A paragraph that is meant to illustrate
Why I think I deserve the spot.
Letting the pen balance between my index and thumb,
I try to calculate a witty response
To the question presented.
The question itself is cold, lifeless.
I can almost hear the mocking monotony in the words:

“List three adjectives about yourself.”
I blink
Again, again, again,
Syncopating to the rhythmic tick, tick
Of my watch.
Shy, logical, comical.
I’m shy because I struggle with saying hi to someone
My ears ring and my cheeks sting when I receive a compliment
And...
I stop writing.
The question didn’t call for an explanation.
All they want to know about me
Are three words
And some commas.
I am in a house with three walls
With ink spilling out of my pores.
I am so alive it hurts.
The adjectives stare back at me,
As flat and expansive as the paper.
I am logical
Because girls like me
Don’t get to dream.
We live in three-walled houses,
Letting the world spin around us.
I am comical.
Funny girls don’t get their feelings hurt,
Right?
I use irony to hide my own anxiety.
I have mastered the ability
Of wrenching a full laugh from my belly
Letting it burble out
Believable and carefree
As a soft, shallow brook.
I stop writing.
My hand cramps and a faint pounding
Reverberates in the back of my head.
But even then,
I start to feel the three-walled house,
Fall Away.

Cracked Porcelain

Poem by Corinne Brien

Charcoal on paper with digital alteration by Alison Rust



Be you, but only the perfect version of you.
Do not let your manicured claws
Shred porcelain skin.
A lightning crack unveils
The flames beneath your light irises.
Thunder rattles your frail bones.

Confidence pulverized,
You anticipate the storm.
Doom whispers in your ear
And your skin smatters with fear.
Your role in this house is to cook and to clean,
But your voice is so much more than a household chore;
In fact, it can rattle and echo like the rolling crash of thunder.
You know in your heart, feel in your bones, and sense in your soul
The end lurks near.
You see your lipstick,
smeared on the mirror
in a curly cursive,
Warning you to beware.

•

Beyond the rosy red, you see what they see—
Green eyes and perfect cheekbones that
Reflect on immaculately curled hair.
Oxygen ignites flames in your lungs,
fanning the flame of
your
emotions,
Stoking the heat of pain.
The noise around you crackles
as your thoughts rage from a murmur to a roar—
the voice that was trapped is now on the mirror to see.
Trapped flames are only truly deadly when accelerated by the energy
from a toxic infusion of antidotes that numb taste buds and slide down your throat.

Your husband softly yells, “Honey, I’m home,”
And he discovers you lying there,
The red cursive on the mirror matching the shreds
That mar the relaxed curve of your porcelain pale neck
And the smudged, red kiss on the lip of the bottle.
He only ever saw your rosy lips turned up in a smile
And crystal blue eyes squinting with delight.
He never saw the flames of dreams beneath the skin,
So the walls caved in and time ran out.

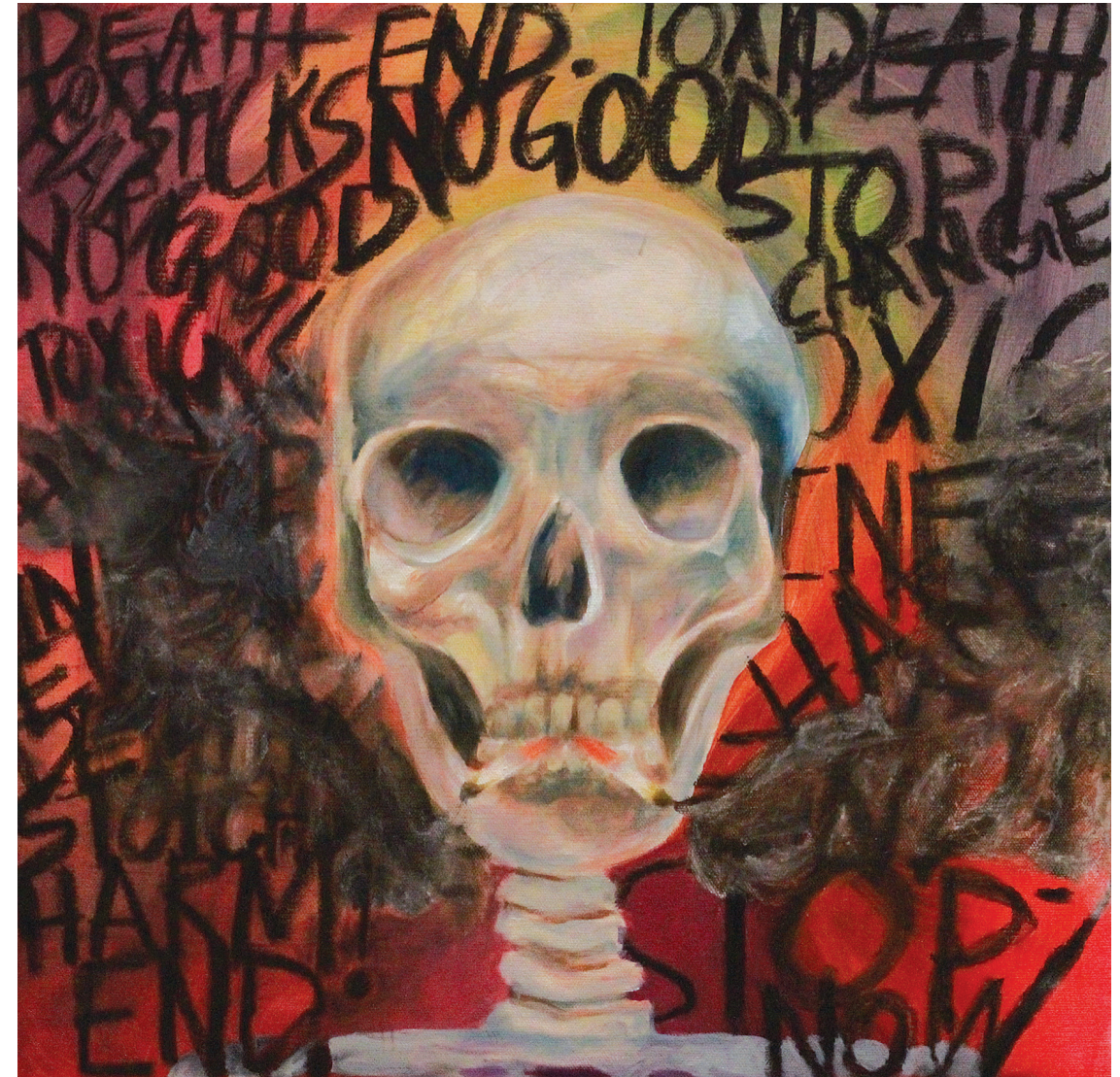
Urn in a fireplace

Poem by Grace Miller
Painting (oil on canvas) by Sydni Hill

Your curves are gentle,
Soft white blurs with gray lines,
As you stand strong.
Your sloping marble shape stands tall
Against the cold red bricks.
Their crumbling plaster
Has fallen at your feet,
To mix with the ash of the hearth.
And yet, that is what you contain:
Ash.

Ash that once held life and moved freely about the earth
Without containment by such solid marble
Ash that lived each day with warmth and curves
Made of skin and bone,
No fire or rock.

You could breathe,
But sometimes you inhaled ash and smoke,
So much so that now,
That is all you are:
Ash.





Città del Vaticano

Poem by Sam Lance
Mixed media by Katie Wilkins

The Catholic dream—
To see the walls emblazoned with the virtues and sins of man,
Of scholars lounging in the chambers of the Pope,
And saints looking upon those standing below them;
Of taloned monsters pulling the damned into hell,
And the outcasts—Adam and Eve—
Created in the image of the divine, now wrinkled and shamed.
The fantasy of gold-encrusted walls, sparkling marble floors,
And images of their god draw them there.
They flock to the square to hear their leader pull words from the heavens,
Pouring them over his open-armed disciples waiting below him,
And as darkness falls upon the Holy City,
Corruption lays its ageless head down to rest
Among the works of Botticelli and the dome of Michelangelo,
Dreaming of the glorious conflict it has wrought here
And holding fast to its chest the stolen innocence of a child.

Rugs

Poem by Sophie Fuchs

*There's this idea that Thai rug-makers have:
That there is no perfect rug a human could make—
only God could create a rug without flaw.
Because of this, rug-makers will intentionally
Add at least nne mistake to their rug
Out of respect to their God.*

I think that's real smart.
There's something so artful
About a broken piece of work,
The way it works
To make itself greater than the sum
Of its stitches—
Cos Thai rugs aren't just carpets,
They're artwork with a lil quirk,
Never meant to be perfect,
But still worth it.
And they come in way more colors
Than the human race
And they come in way more sizes
Than anyone you'll ever face—
And yet, they're all rugs
And they will get the job done.

What I am trying to show
Is that Thai rug-makers know
What we're all just figuring out:
We're not flawless, and we're not supposed to be—

Not cos of gods or of destiny
But you and me,
We're tainted, spray-painted,
Messed-up, and dressed-up
In clothes that aren't cool,
Our brains are mangled,
And our hearts are tangled
And reckless,
We have endless flawed stitches
To respect the fact
That we should not be without mistakes.
And it's taken
So long for us to see this:
The invisible standard
We stand for
And protect with all our intellect
And hearts,
Which says whether we are good enough—
It's nothing.
It's nothing
Cos you are something.
You were born beyond satisfactory
And no factory or mill
Churning out fashion
And dieting pills
Will ever make you less
Than im-perfect,
You aren't perfect,
And that's how it's supposed to be,
Cos we're all a bunch of rugs,
Ones living off oxygen and hugs,
And any Thai maker will tell you
There is nothing beautiful about perfection,
There is nothing human about missing misdirection,
But there is everything
Beautiful and human
About you.

Winterbird

Poem by Valerie Sheehan
Sketch (graphite pencil) by Grace Scowden

I see you some nights,
when the stars hang in the air
and the snow falls like feathers.
Your shadow dances on the walls,
your footsteps echo
through these halls,
off the hardwood floors
and around the painted corners
In this too-big, empty house.

Your eyes glitter in the candlelight,
your winter breath drifts
in my half-steaming tea,
you are color-stained fingers
in rough charcoal sketches.

You linger with the rainy days,
reflection twirling in the puddles,
laughter dripping from the sky,
umbrella spinning in the clouds.
I walk through antique stores (too often)
to see your form flicker through
the bars of a birdcage,
china teacups,
tarnished silver,
dust on the windowsills.

Summertime brings
tangerine kisses and
sunshine flowers,
wild strawberry smiles and

bluebird eyes,
but winter calls me home to you.

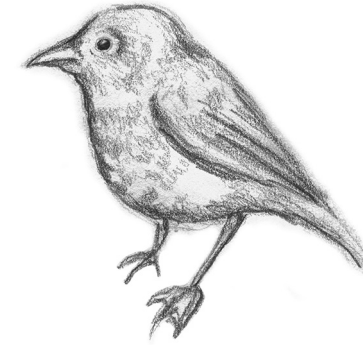
You are in the flakes that fall like ash,
red scarf tied round your neck,
draped across your collarbones,
fluttering in the air
like cardinal's wings,
catching the wind like sails.
You are in the notes of the piano,
ivory keys soft as flurries,
violin strings soaring with the blue jays
in white-grey, heavy-bellied snowstorms.
You were the silver lining,
the sharpness of frost
and the crispness of the cold,
the warmth of the hearth
and half-steaming tea.

You came alive
when the moon rose and
the stars fell to earth,
and your words tumbled
across my pages,

I remember your flickering
moments of melancholy,
your ink-stained fingertips
sweeping up tears.

I remember you because

in a world that couldn't spare
a second glance,
you gave each second
a lifetime.



The Woodpeckers

Poem by Olivia Krueger

Three woodpeckers were each given an identical block of wood.
The first woodpecker glanced at the block. Disinterested in the gift, the woodpecker flew off. The block, left alone, rotted and withered away.
The second woodpecker examined its block and crafted a piece of art. This creation found its place in the world as a museum sculpture.
The third woodpecker, however, seized its block and pecked and pecked away until the head of a woman emerged. The woodpecker continued to work tirelessly every day to craft the perfect figure moving from the head to the neck to the torso and to the legs. Meanwhile, the woman began to dream of the places she'd go once her feet were formed. As the final touches were being made, the woodpecker decided it wasn't finished yet and kept sculpting some more. It chiseled her cheeks and picked at her thighs. It plucked her eyebrows and pecked at her ribs and hacked at the wooden figure until its creation was barely recognizable. Broken, the woman fell to the ground, speechless, and was afraid to move.

The Details

Poem by Murray Hannon

Winter winds.
Ghost sounds.
Sharpie on the walls.
Giving up.
Feeling brave.
My dad when he was tall.

Wet grass.
Broken gate.
Left my keys in the car.
Dinner time.
Popcorn butter.
I hope this scratch doesn't scar.

Retainer case.
Jewelry box.
Best friend's boyfriend's friend.
Disappointment.
Magazines.
Hold that note until the end.

Periwinkle

Poem by Caroline Powers

A solitary periwinkle flower
Reaching for sunbeams
With its satin petals basking in the light
Echoing itself across fields
Like the stunning vibration of a violin
In an empty room
A luscious mossy bush
With hints of vibrant crimson
Spring's subtle arrival
Exposing itself ever so slightly
Generating hope among children
For longer days and shorter nights ahead
The laughter of a child
Resonating in the air
Signaling that tranquility
And harmonious contrast in nature
Will take over gray trees
And white fields



Spring

*Poem by Bianca Sass
Watercolor on paper by Grace Scowden*

To be a girl is to be spring
The conundrum of diamond shimmer rains
Exhaling and drowning
While flowers are coming up for air and
Exploding from the woodwork
In spring
Life, like a child
Stumbles with bliss.

To be a girl is to be March
Unsure and unsteady
But brimming with what will be
Brimming with sometimes yes and sometimes no and
Unlatched hearts
Beating undeterred.

To be a girl
Overflowing with hiccups, waterfalls of laughter
Cupping warmth in the palm of your hands
Taking the shape of a smile
Unfolding like a monarch
Spreading its tissue paper wings.

All the while wisdom
Laces itself within your smile-lines.

But to be a girl is to be the garden
Winter left behind
To ask yourself, how on earth
Could you be worthy
If God himself tried to stamp you out.

This
 Is to be spring
 Is to be a paradox of sky and sea
 Of crisp dawn and chilled midnights
 Is to have
 Wild naivety painting your lashes thick
 Fervent intrepidity drawing your shoulders back
 Wondering how on earth someone could believe
 You are not meant to be here.

To be a girl
 Is to kiss the ground from which your roots grew
 The rubble from which you rose
 Because it taught you how to hold
 First yourself, then anyone and everyone else.

It taught you the strength needed for change
 How to dig for light when darkness is all you have known
 Because beneath the frigid earth, all may seem still
 But nothing is ever still.

And that is the beauty of spring, the symphony
 Of movement
 Erupting from what everyone called a tomb.

To emerge from the cold, to be a girl, to be March
 You learn
 To look straight into the sun the moment it rises
 To feel its light cascade through your optic nerve
 And your dendrites blossom under its rays

You learn to give back
 To the soil that sucked you under last October
 To the soil that grew you once more.

To become April
 To know someday you will be iron-clad and unstoppable
 All the while becoming birdsong and soft
 You must look forward
 But someday you will look down

And the world will have molded
 Under your fingertips.

The yearning will have left grace in its wake.

To become April, you look to the mothers
 The mothers made of voices
 Words storming forte, drizzling pianissimo
 Steadfast intuition and ancient Egyptian pyramid stance
 Soft eyes and moonlight guiding the waves carefully to the shore
 Mothers that comb the knots, the rose petals, the moondust
 Out of your hair with hands
 Delicate as the wind, firm as the pines.

If a monsoon stumbles you backward, look to the mothers
 Those who have weathered an infinity of storms
 And who have sewn the seeds of survival into your bones
 The will to bloom is inside of you somewhere.

Girls will soon learn that tornadoes are no different from winter
 They will leave the skies
 They will leave you behind
 They will teach you to be strong and supple
 To outlast and outlove.

Once all clouds scatter
 The future will be left standing
 Which you will have given everything to build.

Because being a girl
 Is being born into a world that is not ready for you
 A world that is often cold to the touch
 A world that may not want you
 But, by God, a world that needs you.

Being spring
 Is being the return of a sun winter had no right to steal
 But a rose only grows
 Once its beginning is buried
 And here you are, living proof.



*I'm the last ripple of a wave
That fights on before it dies.*

-Murray Hannon

*Photograph with charcoal and pencil drawing
by Rachel Brown*

The Blossom, the Bench, and the Grate

Poem by Logan Moore

The Blossom

Deep, dark red exterior
Her appearance seen as dull and stale to the world
She is frightened by the predatory caws of the birds
And humdrums of the crickets
However, her insides are bursting with life and color
When time comes, fireworks will billow from her blossom
And the world will see her for who she truly is
A beautiful flower

The Bench

He sits with promise
He supports himself and others with his rough but smoothly sanded wood
Yearning to hear the stories of his visitors, he patiently sits and waits
Rifts appear on his once pristine, chestnut wood
The whispers he hears give him excitement
Only to find, they are the wind

The Grate

Ominous and uninviting, he scares many
He is the scrooge of the neighborhood that your mother warned you about
But, something draws you near him
Maybe the mechanic billowing erupting from his very being
Or the idea of endlessness enveloping him
Whatever it may be, you inch closer
The sound grows greater and the holes appear larger
You place your feet carefully knowing you will not trip,
But the idea is terrifying



Morning Break

Poem by Nealy Anderson
Photograph by Ana Gonzalez

Morning break—

When the buzzing chatter fills the void on the lush lawn,
Where proud plaid skirts rest on the green,
crisp blades of properly trimmed grass.
With the blue sky looming overhead,
The flowers, fresh out of their buds, promise hope and spring to
the young, hungry eyes of the intelligent.
The birds whisper in a congress of chirps,
Harmonizing with the breeze
Then the clouds roar in,
A black shadow casts itself over
Big drops of water slowly—then picking up pace—drop down below
Yet, instead of running for cover
The girls dance in the rain.

Static Summer

Poem by Valerie Sheehan

Painting (oil on canvas) by Josephine Fentriss

I watch June pass from the
bottom of a
green glass jam-jar,
liquid sunshine spilling
over the rim
and pouring in,
fill me to the brim.
Cold strawberry tongue,
burning pink eyes,
lazy cat blinking
to throw off the sun.
It's a nothing month,
an afterthought in the
middle of summer.
Skyline heat
brings red watercolor,
washing through the air,
dripping down the sky.
Sparkling grapefruit juice
in cranberry glasses,
pomegranate on
raspberry lips.
Rose-petal cheeks,
pink with
dusty sunrise heat.
Molten glass walls
rise through morning mist,
trapping mint-leaf tea,
mint-stained cheeks,
veins of blue and
eyes of green.
You perch
on the silver tin rim,

salt on your tongue,
the sea on your mind.
You have the wings
of a seagull,
white sails to rise and
catch the wind.
Waves of air
sweep across
the treetops,
send ripples that crash
into nothingness.
They part before the jar—
my jar—
like a river
'round a stone.
Clouds gather,
gentle murmurs
and sparks in the
distance.
You gather your plumage,
shaking the stars
from your hair,
moonlight spilling from
your lips.
Take flight,
ride the storm,
sweep the sky
aside.
Raindrops shatter
against molten glass,
and I watch June pass
from the bottom
of green glass jam-jar.





Time

*Lines by Abigail Nichols
Painting (oil and collage on canvas)
by Grace Claybrook*

I am precious—
Time flies;
But you're the pilot,
So waste me wisely.

Relativity

Poem by Kaili Wang

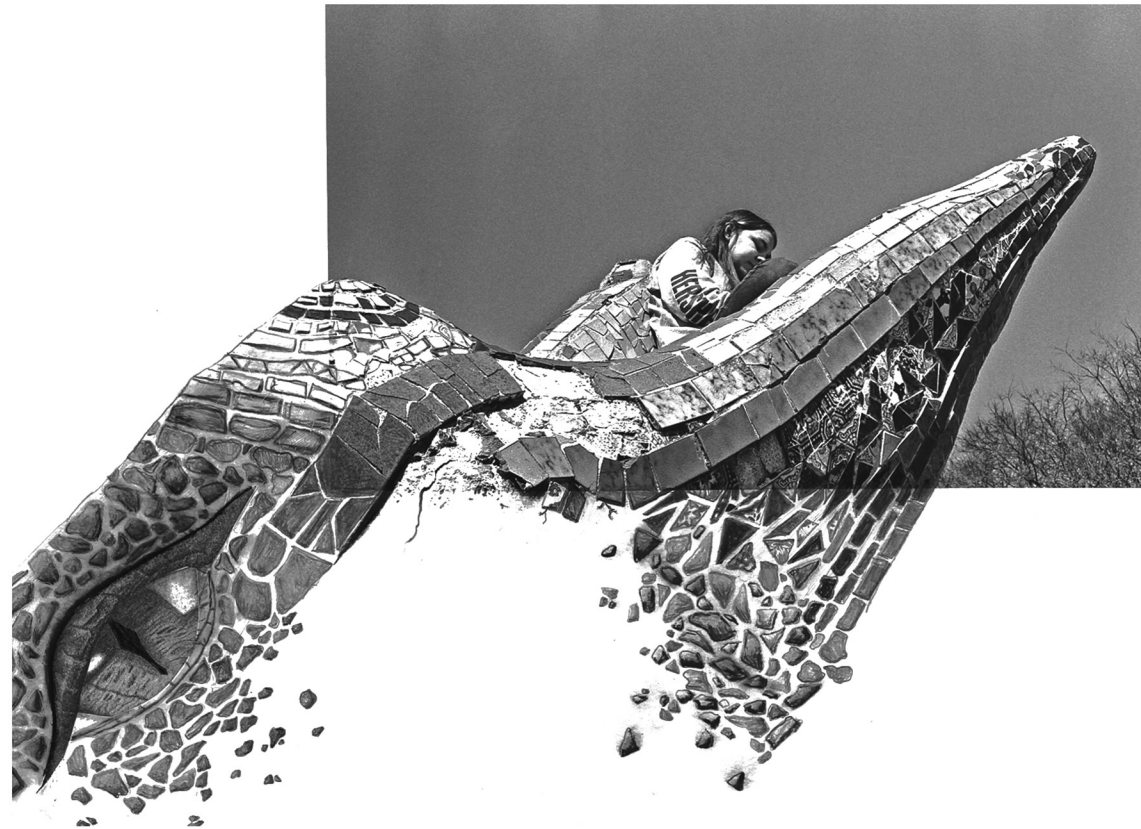
In any person
At some youthful age,
There was a faith of
A future among the stars:
Spinning Jupiter's moons
As you would with a basketball,
Weightless inside a funny costume
That sports Mike Wazowski's eye.
Then, gravity sets in.
We settle for life on earth, for the sake of practicality:
Down rain the texts, tests, and textbooks
And even you fall
in the midst, with the very same acceleration
Such that from your view—
Thanks to Einstein—
You don't notice a thing.

Jörmungandr

*Poem by Valerie Sheehan
Digital print with pencil drawing by Andie LaGrone*

Preface: Jörmungandr was a serpent in Norse mythology, the son of Loki, who was the god of mischief. He was cast into the sea by Odin, the king of the gods, and there, grew large enough to circle the world and bite his own tail. During Ragnarok, the end of the world, he is destined to rise from the sea and slay the thunder god Thor, who, in turn, is destined to slay him.

You were never fortune's favorite, but still, the stars bend to your will, and you bow to no one but the sky.	jaws locked open, teeth gleaming white, salt-water spray against emerald scales and cherry coal eyes,
You are not the golden child, yet you rage with all the fire of the sea, foam-topped waves crashing into the clouds, screaming winds to rip the sky down.	serpent of sinew coiled round the world. When this age crumbles like dried petals under careless fingertips, you will rise from the sea with a scream to rattle time itself.
You are the child of trickery, of sly eyes in the darkness, of shifting shadows and half-crescent, crooked smiles.	You will stir the bones of this earth, venom pouring from your mouth like rain, capture the clouds in your jaws, and poison the sky.
You are the Leviathan,	





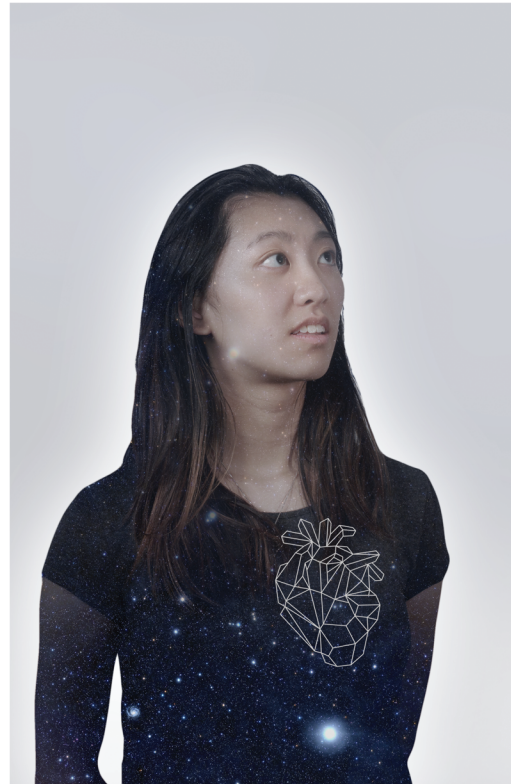
Rising from the Deep

Poem by Dhara Patel

Photograph by Paige Derwenskus

Sinking under the sand,
feeling the pressure
of Great Neptune's dark ocean waves.
I want to taste the sweeter white water.
So I rise from the deep
and leave them behind.

On the surface,
I am anew.
On the surface,
I control the tides.



Watching the Gold Fade

Poem by Ashley Zhu
Digital art by Valerie Sheehan

She studies stars in her spare time,
 hugging air—
 legs dangling out the car window
 mixing eggs into confetti cake batter
 watching the gold fade

she once told me she wanted sunshine,
 scissors, and dandelions (in that order)
 and when asked if she wanted brightness or lightness, she answered
 both

she loves the feeling of her hands and arms being covered in sky blue acrylic
 eating honey and saltines at dawn
 peeling the stickers off crushed water bottles
 and getting lost in seas (of people) and dancing (odes to melting icebergs)

she rejoices in hands
 and windowsills large enough to sit on
 the kind of hair that changes color in the sunlight
 and hardened oil paint in cap-sized swirls

she has a solar system necklace
 on which she imagines stars
 while she dreams in blue, handmade envelopes
 filled with little reminders
 of what is to come

she has an affiliation with wildflowers
 because she wants to be scattered in the wind like seeds
 growing up vibrant and bold and unapologetic
 unplanned

but completely worthwhile
(her greatest fear is being worthless)
and beautiful
(her second)

I guess, it's obvious what this is about at this point—
to find this poem, all I had to do was search the word “blame”—
she, who lived life waiting for it to be kind,
not seeing that it could have been
if she only took the time to study

she, who moved through life numbly
because her feelings expired too quickly
(it was best by birth)
stuck drawing leaves in charcoal
swallowing forced satisfaction, stitches, and delight (in that order)
and when asked if she wanted the end or the beginning, she answered
neither

she was fascinated by her fingers
a fragile, breakable creature such as herself
only wondering how they could still move
after all this (it's funny how sickness distorts interpretations of) time

she had unembellished thoughts
slow, suppressed screamings that she called poetry
content in her smothered self
her body composed of decomposed shells
melted into glass

she told me she wanted to be wistfully colored
buried in mountains of heartbeats
and seas of (she called) sweet sadness (I called) spiteful satisfaction

hers was not a shattering in pieces, for
only stars can destroy glass

burning and ripping apart every molecule
leaving nothing but the smell of sulfur,
hugging air.

Nightfury

Poem by Lizzy Asad

Darkness awakes—
Dipping my finger into onyx hues
Swirling swaths of midnight blue
twirling starburst punches
a stroke of silver and a shimmer of dust.
Today's epilogue is stretched across my eyes.
I lift my hands and scrape my palms against the brittle sky.
I crumble the jagged porcelain saucer,
its pieces dropping into the indigo sea.
I carve golden scratches with my fingernails,
ripping through the somber fabric.
I smudge the stars with my thumb,
obliterating their stuff of dreams into nervous whispers.

Darkness chokes—
Trickling blue streaks my hands
Frothing waves of goodbyes
twisting broken thoughts
a stroke of midnight and a shimmer of tears
Today's epilogue is ruined by my desperate hand.
I shatter—
And I bleed
bleed
bleed
onto the canvas of dawn.



Joanne

Poem by Grace Anne Holladay
Mixed media print by Meghna Ramaiah

The train ticket from Manchester to London King's Cross
Changed the course of my blemished life.
He came to me then in his school robes and wide-eyed glasses,
His lightning scar under his dark sweep of hair.
He made a poignant mark on my heart,
And our twenty-year journey began.

Harry rode with me through the cicatrix of my life.
One failed idea after another, a marred passion for writing,
The death of my mother and hasty remarriage of my father,
An abusive relationship leaving me as a single mother
With a new job every week, waiting for welfare paychecks in the mail.
I branded myself a failure, a defect, a flaw.

I left my mark working as a teacher in Portugal
And as a researcher in a London nonprofit,
But I lived for the moments in the Edinburgh cafes.
The pen scratching, my daughter sleeping—me, writing.

I've tried and failed desperately in life.
But in writing about other worlds, I've begun to find myself.
Imagination healed my scars more than even magic could do.
I've climbed out of rock bottom and I'm proud of my past, as flawed as it was.

Those afternoons spent in Edinburgh cafes
Left me searching for the magic in my tainted life story.
But 450 million book copies and 73 languages later,
I've found that magic isn't in the glitz of success.
No, despite my defects, I've carried the magic all along.
And really, what could be more magical than that?



A Savory Bravery

Poem by Bushra Rahman

Etching by Katie Wilkins

During our weekend sojourn in Warwickshire,
Leofric insisted on paying our respects at the esteemed Benedictine monastery—
The very monastery he had endowed the previous year,
An edifice which gleamed with my husband's piety and charity
For the whole town to see but never to receive.

Heaven forbid I shall think ill of him! No, I must be his dutiful companion.
He was indeed an exceptional man,
Adorning me with his candied words
And layering me with smooth, dulcified satins.
But his sweetness turned stale in his dealings with the village folk.
When he issued a decadent tax upon them as an idea,
Thus began my sole complaint towards the Earl of Mercia.

That day at the monastery, a dainty abbess took my hands
She began to caress them and harked at the softness of their touch
With a similar smoothness, she said,
Of the caramels concocted at the confectionery.
She then gathered her wisdom and told us both
“Be wary of the overindulgences,
The world's injustices lie in excesses and abundances.”

How I wish Leofric had taken heed to those words.
It then fell upon me to keep his gluttony in check.
I pleaded day in and day out for him yield to the interests of his people.
Finally, I became unopposed to stripping myself of all surfeits whatsoever,
Baring myself of the fraudulent garments, unadorned by the world's fallacies.
Pristine as could be, vulnerable, and pure as the hive's unadulterated honey
While my husband succumbed to the wanton desires of avarice,
Never considering his order's toll, a tax capable of emaciating
The town's fittest and finest to a state most devastating.

I ventured out on the sacred ride,
My tresses as my vestment.
A valorous obligation
Coated with the stealth of modesty.
Tom was the sole villager unable to resist temptation,
Paying a hefty toll for his tasteless obtrusion.
Now, all are aware that actions come with consequences,
The delectable effect of my ride on the townsfolk
Upheld the significance of my name, Godgifu: Gift of God.

The bitter aftertaste is that in warding off my husband's exorbitant greed,
I am now remembered as nothing more than an indulgent bite for people to eat.

Polo

(Daisy's Revenge)

Poem by Vivian Herzog
Charcoal on watercolor by Katie Wilkins

He always was a great brute, you know.
Thinking he could ride women just like those
purebreds that did all the work for him.

Such a shame, isn't it?
They're the ones putting up with his incessant whacking
on those endless drives down the field,
blood pumping and haunches heaving
until they're all used up.

I've heard that their hearts explode sometimes—
weary, I'm sure, after the fleeting exertion that mounts ceaselessly.
He rides them hard,
until they die without climax
and he's the one left with a trophy.

Sounds familiar, no?
To be once treated as a promising colt,
showered in champagne and brushed
until your mane is glossy and your
coat shimmers like the pearls he forces on you.

But time takes its toll, darling—
and in the flash of a shutter
the hooves lose their thunder
and the pearls tighten into reins.

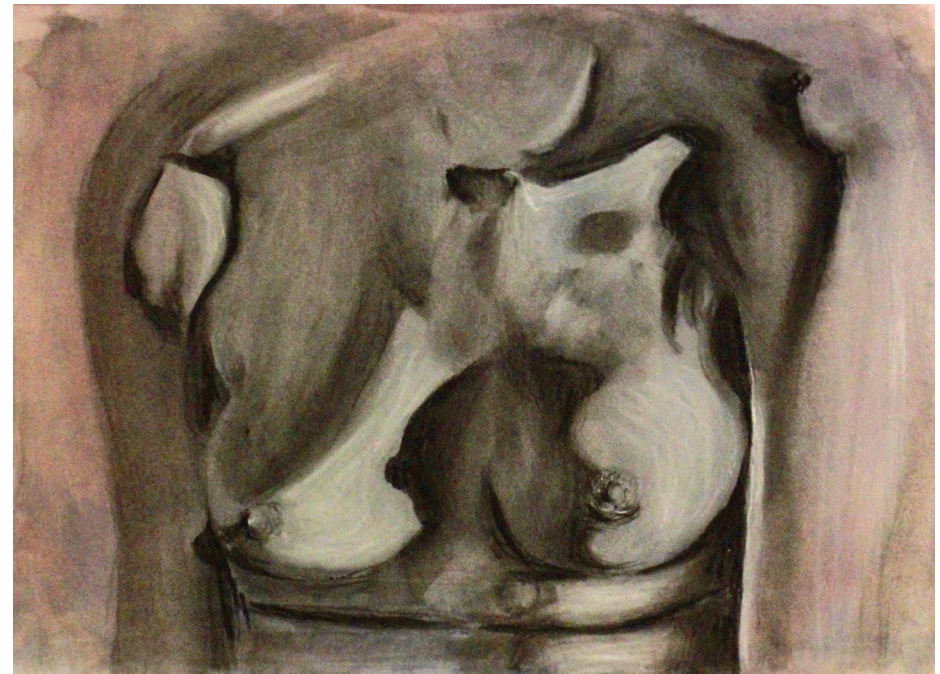
Don't think I didn't know that you were his newest steed.
Please—

I could feel myself dripping in lilac
as I reached mare-hood amidst your broken candlelight and
twilit phone calls.

You see,
there's no doubt I'm beautiful,
but a fool I am not.

And in a dusky coupé
under the vacant eyes of God
I finally proved that,
swerving to watch you go down like all the others.
Chest concaved, breast lopsided—
heart shattered after a shot that veers just wide.

I may have sensed a twinge of guilt,
but it mixed with the ashes and I could finally feel
the smile twisting my lips
and the bit twisting his.





Your Woman

Poem by Murray Hannon
Drawing (colored pencil) by Sadie Paczosa

I know your woman.
She's tall, tanned, thin.
She's big eyed,
Curved like a hillside.
All natural.

I see her every day.
She laughs more than she talks.
She sells beer and burgers,
Dances all night,
But still puts the kids to bed.

I don't know how she does it.
Jokes with you
About the other women
Who don't "get it."
Not like she "gets it."

I know her,
But she isn't real.
Take her out of your art,
And all you have
are empty beds and lakes.
Let her speak her mind,
And the illusion is broken.

Know these women.
The ones who scream and shake.
The ones who cry and hold office.
Know our jagged cliff faces
And our broken nails.

Listen to these women
who rumble like an avalanche,
And know them.

Rainbow Thoughts

Lines by Gaby Viner

Her ideas added to the vivid pile of rainbow
thoughts that could have lit the world's candle.



Baggage Claim

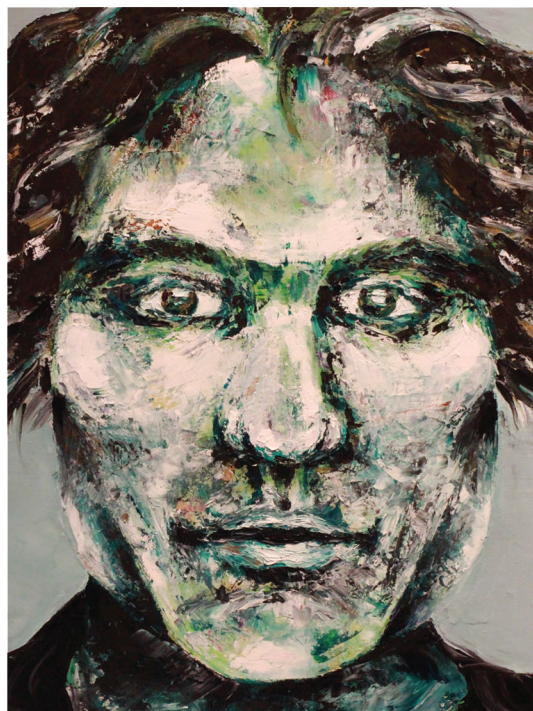
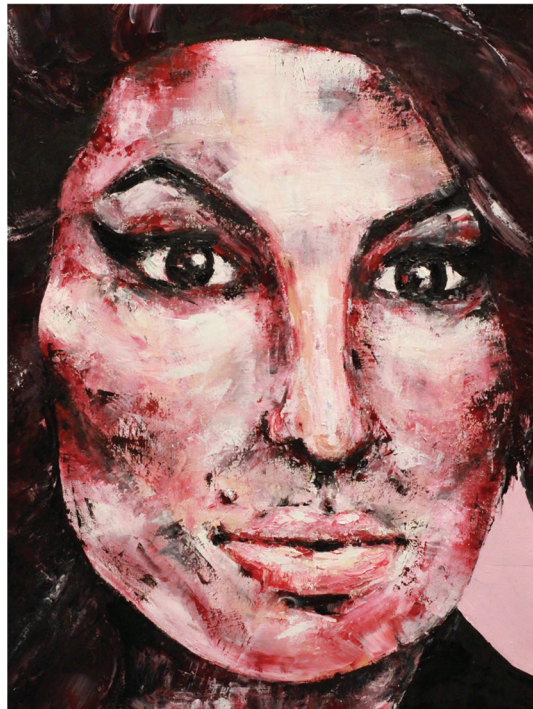
Poem by Emma Mathews
Modged painted paper by Adele Grohovsky

Standing in baggage claim
At the Lima International Airport,
A group of 18 high school strangers
Wait anxiously and impatiently
For each of their single duffel bags.

Ten minutes pass.
The five girls huddled together
Nervously wonder if their luggage
Is lost.
I confidently assure them
That it takes a while.

Five minutes pass.
The three boys clustered together like grapes
Restlessly itch their foreheads,
Doubtful that their bags made it.
I, a second time, assure them that
Their bags certainly did.

Two minutes pass.
And everyone receives their luggage.
That is, everyone but me.



Painting (oil on canvas — above) by Helen Riley Lazenby
Paintings (oil on canvas — opposite) by Julia Nahley

Swings

Poem by Caroline Daniel
Painting (oil on canvas) by Sydni Hill

My parents used to joke
That my grandpa didn't
Stay very long.

The joke was born
At my second
Birthday party—
I wobbled outside to my
Brand new swing set,
And my dad began to push me,
My granddad planted by his side.

Back and forth
The swing it swung,
But my grandpa grew tired
With each tick of the swing's
Timeless clock.

He uprooted his feet
From the soiled ground
And teetered inside.

Grandpa didn't stay very long.

Maybe it was the lifeless
August heat,
Maybe it was the pants,
Thick as baby blankets,
Covering his knobby legs;
Maybe it was the smell of
Newborn rosebuds and
Withered fescue,
Or maybe it was the
Pinched sound
Of the rhythmic swing,
Back and forth,
Back and forth,
Up
And down.

Sixteen years later
I watch as the monitor
Rises and falls like a
Pulsing swing—
Slower and slower
Each time like a kid losing
The energy to pump her legs.

The room is filled with lifeless heat,
But blankets cover him from
Withered head to
Wrinkled toe;
The pinched sound of rusted wheels
Rolls in through the doorway;
The smell of gilded roses and
Mysterious meat
Flutters its weak wings
Into my shaky nostrils.

Still the lifeless monitor
Swings up
And down,
Up...
And
Down...
Up—

The swing rests,
But from my seat on the
Sweaty plastic
I see a soul
Walking through the
Backyard gates—

And I hear the faint
Laughter
Of rusted memories and
Squeaky yesterdays
As my parents say,
Grandpa didn't stay very long.

But I know that even if
His knobby feet had remained
Planted in that soiled ground,
That long would
Never have been
Long enough.



The Man Who Works at Starbucks

Poem by Rachel Hagan
Painting (oil on canvas) by Claire Trabue

To the older man
who works at the Starbucks
that's always cold:

He's always there.
Thick rimmed glasses outline warm, brown eyes
that wink and crinkle when he smiles—
he's not just there to take the orders:
his mellow voice glides on fine gravel
wanting to talk with you,
to get to know you,
to add the sugar to your coffee each day.

He listens with eyebrows lifted,
mouth curved up and real.

He knows Larry,
who takes his coffee with a venti water,
who lingers until his drink is half full.

He knows the healthy lady,
who only wears yoga pants,
and takes her iced tea without sugar.

He knows the girl in leggings,
who wants a grande water—*NO ICE*.

He knows the blonde mother with the sad eyes;
to her he offers a free cookie to cheer her up
even though she shakes her head.

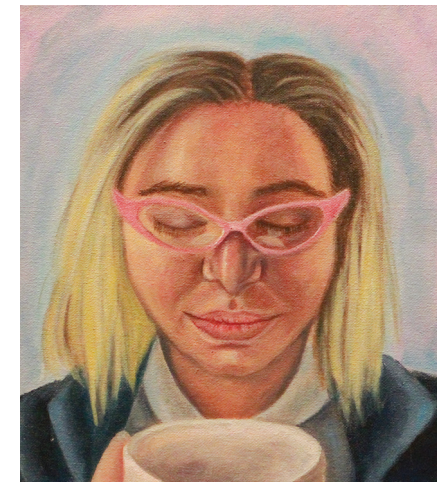
He knows the freckly girl who takes a while to choose,
and he never rushes her—he doesn't even sigh.

And he knows me, the small girl,
who gets the tall iced coffee,
No sugar.

He knows me as the one who sits
and reads the Bible,
who does her homework,
who always gets a refill,
the one who sits by the window.

But he doesn't know
I'm really there to see him—
that everyone comes to see him,
because they can't help it.
He's the warm chocolate chip cookie,
the one with the brown-sugar smile,
the chocolate chip eyes.
He's the one who reminds us, always,
that maybe life isn't all that bad.

So maybe a cookie and a coffee can't fix
every problem you have—
maybe his warm conversation won't melt it all away—
but he never stops trying,
and that makes all the difference.



When Do I feel alive?

Poem by Seville Croker

Photograph (digital) by Sarah Tolbert

When am I alive?
At the Red Caboose Park
I run around as if I'm four again.
When I'm with the people I love.
When I'm alone
With my own thoughts
And surrounded by music
Recorded in 1968.
So somehow
What gives me life
Is reborn when I press *play*.



ER Waiting Room

Narrative by Sophie Fuchs

Sketch (chalk pastel and charcoal on bristol) by Karen Dordor

Mixed media (following page) Ainsley Hanrahan

I was crinkled up in a fat, teal armchair. I wore this real big hoodie. Dark navy. "St. Mary's Academy" on front. Logo of a stoic goddess. The hoodie gulped me down, 'til only the rubber tips of my sneakers peeked out of the cotton avalanche.

I pulled the hood strings tight so only a nickel of artificial light shone on my puffy, colored-in nose. I closed my eyes and shoved my hands in my pocket.

I listened. People ran. Boots and stilettos clopped on tile, chasing the stretchers hauling loved ones. Dripping—IV or body?—too loud for tears, but not enough for piss or med syrup.

Adults sobbed. Kids yelled, squirmed. Drunks spat. The cop yelled to shut the hell up. Glanced at me, annoyed. Alarms shrieked. Nurses called.

It was so loud. I swear I could hear the damn blood bags pumping.

I exhaled. Began shutting myself down into nothingness.

There's this moment of pure, supersaturated empty that eats up your brain. Your cranium is overheating and rattling until this moment, when it breaks. You feel silence. There's no thought, no sound, no person inside. The nothing wraps around you like a warm blanket.

I almost had it, when I felt a small tap. I slowly loosened my hood. There was a brunette girl, eight or something, with a blue shift and uneven orange hair ribbons, standing with a rough, pearly fingernail raised to poke again.

She scanned my face.



“What.”

She pointed at my nose. “What’s that?”

My skin tingled where she pointed. A hot spider feeling scampered over my cheeks to nest in the butterfly bandage on my busted nose.

“The damn Mona Lisa,” I told her.

She shifted around in her tiny pink shoes, but didn’t leave. “What’s your name?”

“Fauntleroy.”

She nodded, believing me. “I’m Emma.”

I dropped my head back against the chair and closed my eyes. Her shoes squeaked. I tried to zone out. Her shoes squeaked louder.

I let out a long, pointed sigh before facing the kid. “What do you want?”

“Why’s your nose green-y?”

“Because I got in a fight with a loan shark ‘n his gang after embezzling two million dollars from his casino. And the bastards are probably looking for me right now, so you should go the hell away.”

She practically leapt into an adjacent chair. “What’s a lone shark? Are they bad guys? What’s ‘enbezzling’ mean? Didja win? Oh!” After looking side to side, she leaned over. “Are you a ninja?”

“Well if I was, I’d have to be a pretty crap one, considering the damn—I mean, the darn—Robert Motherwell living on my face right now.”

She nodded like she knew what I was talking about. “Is that why you’re here? Cos you got inna fight?”

I crossed my arms and reclined. My knees splayed out. My hood fell over my eyes.

“Is it?” she asked. Her voice was suddenly cold. Stony. “Cos I don’t think so. Your bruises are old, but there’s blood on your arms, and it’s still wet. There’s a whole lotta blood on you. It’s running down your hands and dripping off your fingers. The others can’t see it, but I do. I see all sorts of things they can’t.”

She stood up to be my height. I didn’t move. Block it out. Don’t listen. Don’t listen.

“I saw your car coming,” she continued. Shut up. Shut up. Don’t listen. “You were driving real fast. An’ your eyes were wet, all blurry. An’ your arms were red. An’ then you hit us.”

My head shot up. She was staring hard into space like she was watching the accident happen right there in the waiting room. She felt me looking and returned the gaze. Her head was tilted far to the side and I saw for the first time a thick trickle of blood running behind her ear.

She reached over and patted my shoulder. “Don’t worry, big brother. I’m okay now. You can be okay too, if you want. If you tell them about the blood.”

She smiled, hopped to the side, turned to sprint away.

“Hey, wait,” I called, reaching to stop her, but fell out my chair. Clammy linoleum slammed into me. I jerked my head, but she was gone and the room was empty. There was nothing but a puddle of someone’s damn blood.





*i used to wander through
the rows of graves, looking for
kids, looking for girls,
looking for scattered families,
looking for my kind of ghosts.*

-Skye Dupree

Monoprint by Sadie Paczosa

Oh father



Poem by Augusta Bowhay

Oh Father, don thy collar,
A sign of your position with God, capital G.
But that cloth will never refrain you
From smiling wide at my spasmodic outburst of club meets tribal
dancing to Kanye.
Or unflinching smile when I state the worn out,
“Oh yes. Silly me. Must be the heroin again.”
Or when we are surrounded by teeny boppers at a concert
And we jump up and down, singing our hearts out,
Being fools.
A reply to my note from parents’ night, (and a drawing),
Saying you and mom did kick some ass.
Or from tearing up when I unknowingly say something special.
From giving me bear hugs when you sense my shakiness.
The collar on you that makes me know
Religion is only love with no judgement in sight.

My Sister



Prose poem by Sophie McKenzie

Ukraine is my sister sometimes. A loving and patient sister.
We walk in step, me and Ukraine. She sleeps in my bed and whispers
words of comfort to me. She tells me where there is a place far away
that she knows well. When I lie in bed awake, no peacefulness in my
mind allowing me to float into the ocean, she says to me, “*Kokhana*,
darling, there is a place far from here where the people are kind and
the winters are cold and the nights are longer than you.”

When I walk alone it is harder to have a sister like her. When
I am scared of the swarm of flies that flood to my carcass, I pray that
my hand will be held. My hideaway and my cruciform are the cold
oceans, and my God is quiet. The silence is a vast fullness. My atoms
vibrating so I can hear nothing but the call of my cross. And
sometimes, on those days when my body feels old and my soul
is ancient and my mind is somewhere far away, I will listen to my
echo amidst the flies and through the night which will say *pryyshov*
do mene dodomu, kokhana. Come home to me, darling.

The Gardener

*Poem by Rachel Hagan
Charcoal pencil, gouache, gold leaf,
and gold ink on paper by Jordyn Lesh*

A gardener stretches
her slim hands
in cotton gloves.
She kneels down,
careless
of grass stains and dirt.
Carefully
she plants
a small bulb,
the smell of sun radiating
from her and in her.

Every day she tends
to the bulb,
taking time to pull each
weed from the root.
Her hands guide
the watering can to sprinkle
just the right amount.

The bulb sprouts
before her eyes,
shooting green everywhere.
Carefully

the gardener removes
dead leaves,
waters and weeds.

Too soon she sees
the purple head bloom,
The moment she so anxiously
looked forward to—
and yet,
there was so much joy
in helping it grow
that its petals bloomed
bittersweet.

Joy in the soil,
joy in the rain,
joy in the sun,
the weeds,
the time.
Joy in green sprouts,
joy in the purple head,
joy as she puts
her child
to bed.





first Love

Poem by Ella McKenzie

there is something to be said
for forgetting the cadence of my first love's voice
but remembering the music
of his cry

A Drag-Racer's Symphony

Rumination by Marimac McRae
Copic marker & colored pencil drawing by Sloan Fridrich

Late at night you could hear the speed of the cars bouncing off everything playing games in the trees veering into my room the speed keeps me up at night and I realize that if I left for home I would be haunted by that siren song of speed I want you to go to the mountains with me but you're somewhere caught in the neck of the bottle and I'm bound by the stiff spine of the book I wish I didn't but I feel us separated by the canyons of fast sounds that swell in the damp night air.

Or is that sound the earthquake that pushed us together is that sound the canyon that we have fallen into? I cannot quite be sure.

But you sit and the feeling of fastness comes screaming out of your every pore you're a challenge in its purest form and I don't want to waste a boy like you but your eyes feel like lightning when they land on me and your voice is as enticing as the tearing sounds of the drag-racers etched around our neighborhood at night.

I like to think that the circles the drag-racers' carve will bring us together but I can't help but wonder if I'm actually lost in the sound of you or if the only things I find intoxicating are these thrilling phantoms racing these circles around us.

Scenario

Scene sketch by Maggie Sullivan
Linoleum block print by Margaret Gaw

*Here we go, yo, here we go, yo;
So what, so what, so what's the scenario?
Here we go, yo, here we go, yo;
So what, so what, so what's the scenario?*

His apologies are bleeding off his mouth. I don't want him to continue, but he does. I know it is not his fault. I saw the car across the intersection, refusing to be delicate and not fast enough. I felt the rattle of metal skeletons as we collided. I know it is not his fault.

I pace in a foreign field, unable to find my footing. My words are stumbling, too, as I tell my dad Emergency, and Should we call the police. The two are talking, investigating the irreparability. A flurry of numbers flows past me as I stand by, phone claim call year license model claim phone license year phone call.

I cancel the inevitable in my head; I scratch it through with red pen. I know the immense work I have to do; I know my place is not here. Instead I am in this anonymous yard, only a thin sweatshirt keeping me from this cold that swirls like coffee, somewhat still but never stopping.

I get a text from a friend who passed the scene with me offstage, I saw you outside are you okay. I take pictures with a stark flash of the damages. They, like the world I cannot stop seeing, are too high contrast. I run to pick up the piece of a bumper left in the street, so dented it is no longer car. I feel as though my eyes have receded into their sockets, weary of their broken circumstance. I watch my waning yellow battery as it dissipates, and eons of cars with their passive stares.

The police come in the epilogue of the evening. The report is extensive and scribbled in blue. The policeman meanders as he speaks. I hope he knows and he is not numb to the chill and to me. The harsh light of the tow truck, the blaring brightness of the patrol car refuse to leave. They swim lazily in purple across my vision.

I look back at my brother. I want to tell him a soft Yes and hug him across the dashboard.

My brother is not one for affection.

I hug him anyway. I feel electric like jumper cables.



Remembrance

Lines by Mary Blake Graves
Watercolor on paper by Grace Scowden

*The meaning of life is one couch, seven people,
light eyes, a fiery soul, real life, remembrance.*

The Sea

Memoir (excerpt) by Sterling Akers
Photograph (next page) by Taylor Farrington

*The sea holds a memory, contained forever in its depths; a memory
that will never be alive again, a memory that is mine alone.*

The first thing I notice is the hint of light streaming through my window. The second thing is the soft weight that settles behind me and the gentle breath by my ear. The third is the increase in my heart rate and the warmth that runs from my head to the tip of my toes, goosebumps following its progression. I roll over, body melding into the familiar embrace, and see depths of emotion in the sea blue eyes, knowing they are reflections of my own.

It is my favorite way to wake up.

A whispered good morning, a feather light kiss, a heartfelt “I love you” completes the morning routine. We leave the comfort of the warm bed, me wincing slightly at the icy floor. We slip out, matching shirts and all, and feel the touch of the breeze as it blows across our face. The hint of salt enters our noses, as the crash of



the waves reaches our ears. The sea stretches before us, extending over the horizon, gentle waves washing up by our feet as we leave our footprints in the sandy ground.

It seems like it is just us in the world.

•

My body cries out for the missing piece of me; my legs lock together and my heart skips a beat when I hear his name. I know that he is in paradise, and I imagine him at God’s side, welcoming him home to his dream house. But nostalgia spills from my eyes and from my core, wishing desperately to have him back, wishing desperately to give up the brittle beauty of understanding and dive back into my flaming body of blind feeling. I wish I could hear him laugh, I wish I could see him smile. But I know that he is home, walking among the nature, listening to the sea rumbling, and brightening the days of everyone he sees. I know he is how he should always be—free and happy, always at peace. And I know that one day I will see him again, and that will be the “perfect / beginning and / conclusion of our own” story.



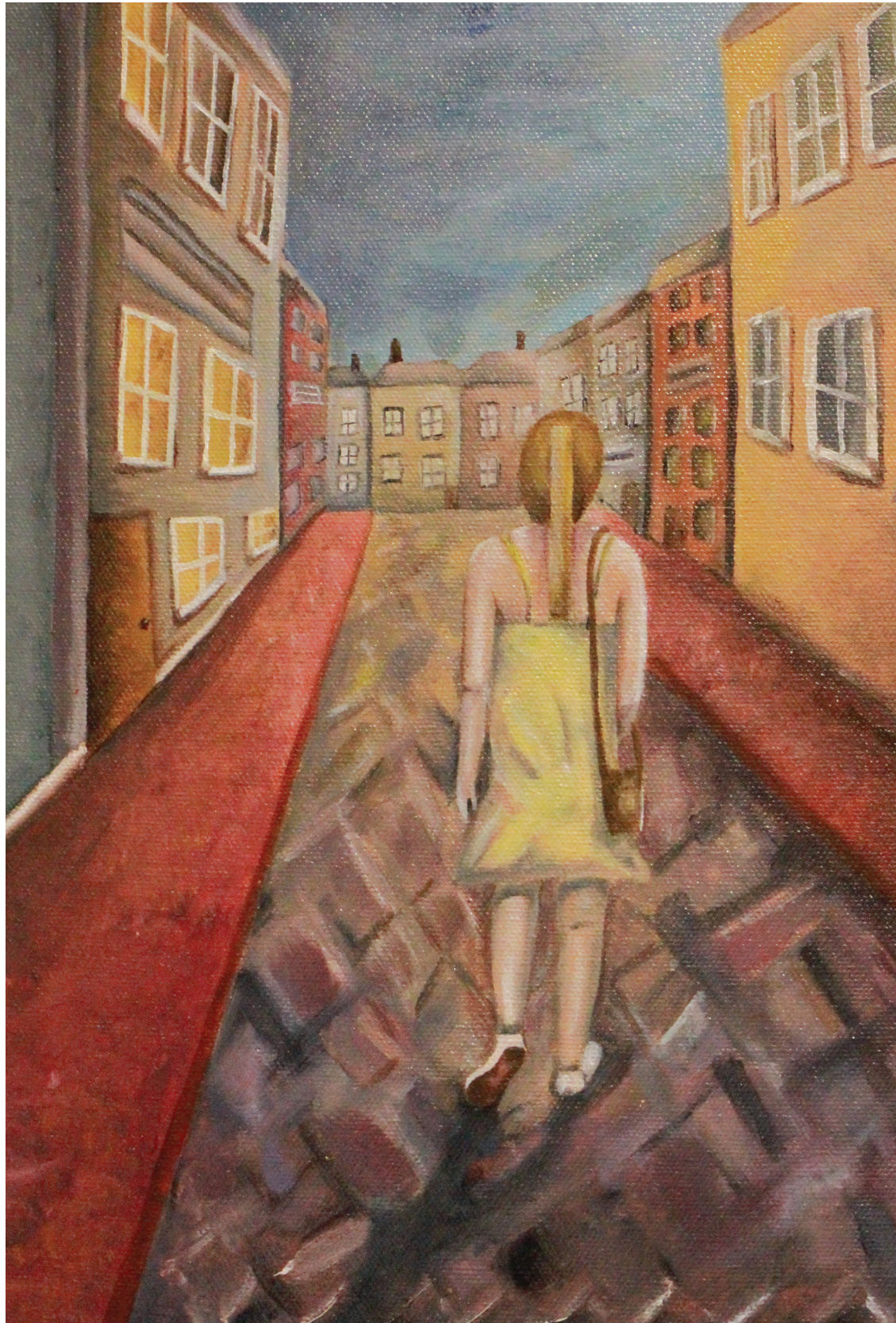
Relief



Reflection by Marimac McRae
Photograph (with watercolor) by Emari Frazier



There are people moving through me. They look ashen like me. They look tired like me, dark circles playing games under their eyes, like swing sets, like merry go rounds. Like follow the leader we shuffle with leaden ankles through the ashes knee deep all over the floor. The ashes choke my light breath. The ashes cloud my eyes. The ashes irritate my nose until I have to run for the restroom. There are too many tissues anyhow. Pinched and white like dresses at first communion, they line the trash can like flowers at the bottom of a valley. I start crying again because each little tissue dress makes me think of one more person who couldn’t take it anymore. One more person who got choked by the ashes. One more person who ran for relief, and the relief is as subtle as it is inconsistent. The grief of sympathy is more overwhelming than my own. They don’t tell you that when you’re going to the funeral of a 16-year-old boy. Nobody is going to tell you that.



Life Is Slow until It Isn't

Memoir by Karin Scott

Painting (oil on canvas) by Elizabeth Wood

They told me life is like a ball of yarn, slow at the beginning until it speeds up as it nears the end. Life is slow until it isn't. And when it isn't, you long to wrap your hands around your bed post as time drags you away from your home. You long to wrap yourself in a cocoon of your bed sheets, hoping that your dad will throw them off of you and chase you around in your Aladdin pajamas before helping you brush your teeth for school. Life is slow until it isn't.

You pull on your plaid skirt before the first day of seventh grade. You can't yet feel the love that will be poured into that skirt whenever your mom hurriedly lets out the hem late at night before a skirt check the next day. That skirt gets longer as you get taller. Your mother's hands move faster as they race to catch up with her daughter's never-ending growth spurts until, all of a sudden, the skirt reaches the end of its hem. And it hits you that you're 18 wearing the skirt that took you through middle school, and for the first time in your life, that skirt has reached the end of its hem. Life is slow until it isn't.

You used to sit in your assembly seat, somewhere in the back, as the older girls stood before you and told you about themselves—about the experiences that molded them into the person they are. But all of a sudden, you blink and you're blinded by the stage lights as you stand before a room of younger girls. And you try to tell them about the experiences that molded you into the person you are until you realize you can't name any. Because all your life, they told you how fast it would go, but you never listened. And suddenly 18 years isn't as long as it used to be. Life is slow until it isn't.

Growing up may be gradual, but realizing you're old is sudden. It's a realization that happens when you look at your dog, the dog you got the summer before 1st grade, the dog whose face is now covered in gray. It happens when you go to Office Depot with your school supplies list, the list that always included a glue stick, the list that now requires a TI-84 plus calculator. It happens when you look at your dad, the man who used to chase you around in your Aladdin pajamas, the man who now swallows a pill for his back pain. It happens when you look at

your mom, the woman who used to pack your lunch and drive you to school, the woman who now anxiously watches you drive away on your own. Life is slow until it isn't.

Life is like a ball of yarn, slow at the beginning until it speeds up as you near the end. They told me this years ago. But what they forgot to mention is that the yarn picks up speed much sooner than you could have known. I got home only to reach out for my long white dress—the dress that will carry me to the end of my childhood. I wish that white dress would turn into my bed sheets and that my dad would throw them off of me, chase me around in my Aladdin pajamas, and help me brush my teeth before school.

Photograph by Ellie Truitt

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